

HF I was trying to pick up my train of thought. I won the semi-final heat on the second day, and then we had about two and a half hours for me to think about the fact that I had just broken the world's record in the thing. Now, the world's record nowadays--it's so much faster than it was then. My world's record was 47.8 seconds. Imbock's world record was 48 flat, and the world's record that Eric Liddell would break in the final heat was 47.6. Those aren't comparable to nowadays, but there is a lot of reason why--more efficient track and more training where we in those days trained while we worked. Nowadays they train for a year or so before the finals, and the one fact I've tried to reiterate here is that nowadays they know that the quarter mile is a sprint all the way, and these fellows are sprinters. In those days they thought of the quarter mile as a little distance race. And we were trained--coached to lay back in the middle, as we called it in those days "to coast in the middle of the race" and then speed at the start and a big burst of speed at the end, which I thought I could do with Eric Liddell.

Begin Tape 2, Side 3

HF They didn't do that at our banquet..., but it makes a good story.

MB So, then you came on back directly after your week in England?

HF We went back to our camp. It seemed logical because we had to wait for a certain time when the boat was due, and there was no place else for us to go. So, this was the last day at the camp, but it's after we went to England.

MB You went back to France and then came--

HF We went back to France, I should say. I don't know that there was anything particular about the trip back except for the fact that we had about half as many athletes and twice as many people along who were girls fortunately.

TS Did you get a good welcome when you went back, when you got back into the United States?

HF Well, we had a "Fifth Avenue" welcome. We had a parade up Fifth Avenue, and we went up to the steps of the New York City Hall. Mayor Highland (Sp.?), I believe his name was, at that time, gave a welcoming speech and so on. It wasn't anything like Lindbergh's, but it was still a very good thing. There was on the Olympic Team a high school boy, who was a sprinter on the Olympic Team, from the New York area. People began yelling his name-- I can't think what it was now, and the Olympic Team took it up. They said, "Rodney for mayor, Rodney for mayor, Rodney for mayor!" So, we marched down Fifth Avenue yelling that...!

MB Well, let's see. Loud speaker--I guess he's giving a speech or just showing off.

HF Oh, he's showing off, yes.

MB Smoking wasn't forbidden for athletes?

HF Not on the trip back. I don't remember ever having seen any athletes on the way over smoking.

MB Dolly Netter (Sp.?)

HF One of the girls--there were three girls I got acquainted with on the way back. Two of them were American society. They went to college just outside of San Francisco. What is that famous girls' college in California? One of them was from Connecticut and went to college clear across the country. They were very nice girls, and I was interested in them. And the third girl was about as far away from them as you could imagine. She was an English--what do they call their vaudeville shows? Wait a minute, they have a name over there. Well, the English vaudeville. She was a dancer in the English vaudeville, and she got to be so good that she became a dancing teacher and was sent over to teach an English company in New York to put on a dance at a revue. She was very nice, and her name was Dolly Netter. I got acquainted with her. It was quite a little difference from the society girls, but I enjoyed all three of them.

MB That made the trip interesting.

Green Goddess!

HF That's the goddess of liberty.

MB Yes, and "A good picture," Ann says. It looks like the heads are cut off.

HF Yes, it cut off the man's head. Ann Rathum (Sp.?). That was my Connecticut girl. I was really caught with her--if Connecticut hadn't been such a long way away! I might have found a wife there because she was worthwhile.

MB And I guess this is the newspaperman coming aboard and so forth.

HF This is on the deck. Most of us were gathered there. And that's about it.

TS Yes.

HF And I guess we stayed overnight in New York. Then, what a letdown--got on the train and went back to Chicago. The next day started--eight hours of work again. I got back and reported to work. I told the boss, "I'm back, and I had a nice trip."

And he said, "Why did you come back so soon?"

I said, "I thought I had a job here, and I should get back as soon as I could."

He said, "You were on the Olympic Teams, why didn't you go to Rome or Stockholm or some place where a lot of the athletes went?"

Imagine how I felt; I got back just too soon!

TS What was your life then after the Olympics?

HF After the Olympics, as I said, I went right back to the same job at the Chicago Union Station Company, and I saw the station rise up to eight stories, which at that time was as high as it went. It is higher now. Then, as I said, an engineer is an educated tramp. The engineers were getting fired right and left because their jobs would run out. My job as an inspector of public utilities--they were still putting in new utilities, and I was needed. But finally in 1927 the boss, and he wasn't the original boss, he was just a secondary one that was left there--he called me in and said, "Horace, (he called me Horace for four years!) I'm afraid your job is overwith. I'm afraid that you're out of a job from now on." Which I certainly didn't wonder about because I was just waiting for the axe for a while, and my job was over.

So, I went to an engineering--actually, I was talking to a friend, I said, "I'm out of a job. I don't know what to do."

He said, "I saw in Printers' Ink (Printers' Ink is a magazine about publishers) that an engineering magazine wants an associate editor, an assistant editor."

And I looked up the copy of Printers' Ink, and it was in Chicago. I went over, and I got the job. So, for two years I was an assistant and an associate editor of Rock Products Magazine, which deals with quarries, sand and gravel plants, cement, and all that kind of thing. That took me to--all over the country. I got as far down as Georgia, Nebraska, and Wisconsin. I did cover some conventions. National Safety Council in New York City. I went to Horseheads, New York, which is a town that has a history, I don't doubt, though I don't know it. So, I was going around. One week of every two: one week we'd stay in Chicago and put our paper together and write our stories; the next week we'd get in our own car and go maybe to Iowa, maybe to Wisconsin--wherever there was a good story for a cement plant or about the building of these things and the operation of them. But, you see what that did to training. Now, I was still running for the Chicago Athletic Association in good standing, but for those two years I would be out of town and usually at a hotel or something like that where--where could you find a place to train? And when I got back to Chicago, we worked overtime. If I tried to train after I'd had a day's work on the paper, I'd get home about nine o'clock at night. That's no good.

TS Were you married at that time?

HF Right at the end of that--no, not quite then. I was married the following year.

So, in 1927 to 1929 I was in a very bad position to train, and the Olympics were to be at Amsterdam in 1928. I had decided that frankly I thought that I'd had such an easy time in the 1924 Olympics that I could make the '28 Olympics, and I think I could have if I had had a chance to train. So, I trained as much as I could, and the tryouts were at the new Philadelphia stadium which they called the Sesquecentennial Stadium because it was one hundred and fifty years after the Declaration of Independence.

HF It has another name now, but it's still there. And I got through in the trials. I got through the preliminaries, the second race, but in the semi-finals I had pulled a muscle. I just couldn't run, and so I was out of it. And I said when I got out, when I stopped panting, I said, "That is my race!" And it was.

TS What did your life consist of then after your Olympics?

HF I had the dirtiest thing, I think. There was an associate editor at Rock Products who thought he had a better job, and so he resigned. I was promptly made associate editor. And then his job didn't pan out, and he came back to the editor-in-chief--and I think this is skull-duggery. He said, "I want my old job back."

The editor-in-chief said, "You've got it." Then, he called me in and said, "Sorry, you're out of a job." Just like that! And so, what could I do?

I talked to a friend of mine, a fraternity brother. In fact, he was later my best man at my wedding. And I said, "What in the heck can I do? It's a hard time to get a job right now." The Depression hadn't started, but it was a hard time.

He said, "You graduated in engineering, why don't you go down to the University of Illinois and ask for a job on the faculty?" I said, "Huh? I'm no professor. I never did talk in front of a class!" He said, "Well, you've got your degree, so why don't you go? You won't lose anything."

I'll be darned if I didn't go down there and get the job without more than half trying! So, I became--at the end, in September, 1929, I became an instructor at the University of Illinois. And I've never regretted it since. Very good success.

MB You stayed there for a long time?

HF Actually, no. I went back. I went there in 1929, and about a month after I went there, the big crash came. Whoop-de-do! It was really something, but it didn't affect colleges for a couple of years yet. It was the small-time daily worker that got affected first. Finally, in 1932, it affected the colleges, and the head of our department called us in--all four of us--and said, "Sorry, boys, the powers that be, the president's office says that we've got to cut our faculty down. So, I've got to cut two of you fellows off the staff." We looked at each other. We were all young fellows and all married within the last four years. And then, he sort of smiled and said, "Now, I know that maybe because you're all married, you're worried about getting another job. You all want to be college teachers, and to be a college teacher you've got to have a Master's Degree. Not any of you have got a Master's yet, but you could get one if you'd stay another year. So, I proposition you, take half time for the next year and finish your Master's Degree. Then, you can go anywhere you want to." And we looked at each other, and I suppose all of us were worried to death what our wives would say.

So, we said, "Yes, we'll do it." And you know, we lived on half salary,

HF and we lived well. Maybe because we had wives to tell us how to spend our money, I don't know.

MB That helps.

HF But actually it worked out fine. We didn't have any--we didn't feel deprived, I mean. We didn't eat fillet mignon or things like that, but it just worked out fine. All four of us got our Master's Degrees, and then the following year they did have to fire all of us, but we were ready to get a job out teaching. The only time that I was out of teaching after 1929 was that following year. That was the year that FDR came into the Presidency, and he started the--had it started--the Civilian Conservation Corps.

The Dean of Engineering wrote to the head of our State of Illinois CCC and said, "We've got a bunch of good men who don't have jobs." That included four of us and some recent graduates, too. And so, the four of us were all given CCC camps to operate the engineering part. They had an army major to take care of the discipline, but we did all the engineering. We had these young engineers and "ag" engineers to be our lieutenants. Each one of them had a squad of his own, six or eight--I think it was about eight men each one had, and we had a pickup truck. I had a pickup truck to go around and visit all of the work that they were doing and see what they were doing. It was really very nice.

TS And what kind of work did they do?

HF Well, of course, in the mountains they did a lot of trail-making. Not being any mountains to speak of in Illinois, there are some--don't laugh! There are some in Illinois, but what we did was erosion control because there were a lot of places where the fields were being eroded. And we built dams; we planted trees; we planted special grasses like lapradisa (Sp.), which holds the soil in place. We did enough so that I wrote a Master's--no, not a Master's degree, a Civil Engineering degree on the erosion control for small drainage areas. You see, some of these that have crazy names. I think that's a pretty good name--"Erosion Control for Small Drainage Areas"! We built dams; some of them were six or eight feet high. And the farmers were glad to have them because they made ponds, not very big ponds, but the boys like building log dams. It was fun. They didn't care so much about planting trees, but, boy, we planted a lot of them.

TS Where did you go? How long did you work for the CCC?

HF Well, I got the job in June and then stayed there a year, which included--by the way--we were at Pittsfield, Illinois. Do you know where that is?

TS No.

HF Well, it's right--it's in a county which is half-way--which stretches from the Mississippi to the Illinois right across that--

TS The bottom?

HF No, it's the hilliest place in Illinois! That county is all up and down,

HF which is completely different from most of Illinois. And that's why they had so much erosion there because it was hilly country. I stayed there; and about November, I guess, they said, "Pick up your camp, entire camp, two hundred fellows and all the personnel and go to the Ohio River at--well, there's a State Park down there on the Ohio River in Illinois. We had a barracks built right in the State Park, and we stayed there all winter so we could work all winter because there's not much snow on the ground. Then, in the winter we went back to Pittsfield again so that that really is an exciting thing to take a couple--we had World War I trucks, which were always breaking down, and we had a fine older man who could fix those trucks up. I don't know how he did it, but he kept those trucks--each individual group had a truck of its own, and he kept them running. I don't know how he did it. And I stayed there until a year after September.

My wife and I had talked. We had had a good time while we were there, but I found out that she liked being a faculty wife. I liked--I don't know why--I just seemed to fit into teaching, so we decided to look into--there are certain organizations which hire teachers. They may hire them in botany or something like that, but I was interested in the ones that hire them in engineering. And it was pretty hard to get into college because the Depression was on, but there was somebody that died in North Dakota. They sent out a quick call because it was late in August. They sent out a quick call: "Can you get us a man to be qualified as an instructor in Civil Engineering?"

I looked at Dorothy and said, "Do you want to go up in the cold country?" And she said, "Yes, I'll stay inside. You have to go out surveying." Well, I wrote to them, and instantaneously almost I got a letter back, "Come on up!" So, I went up to North Dakota, and I left my wife in Pittsfield. I went up to North Dakota, and everything was fine. I had time to rent a second story which had been built over into an apartment so we lived in that. I went up by train, and she came up by car. She got the daughter of the veterinary doctor where we'd been staying--she and whatever--the daughter's name came up together and stayed. The daughter left a week or so later, but we lived there for four years.

Begin Tape 2, Side 4

HF We stayed there for four years. We had no difficulties. I could have stayed there longer. They wanted me to, but, I don't know, my wife--in the first place she was just about to have a baby, and in the second place she didn't mind cold weather because the first thing she bought there was a fur coat! What troubled her, being from Colorado, was that the valley there had no mountains. Actually, North Dakota has no mountains. They have some things they call mountains, but they're only high hills. And she was from Pueblo. She'd been born and brought up with mountains, and she couldn't stand this area. It was so flat you could look across a corn field and actually look under the trees! There was just nothing there in that Red River Valley. If you'd go out, I'd say, about fifteen miles west of Fargo, all of a sudden you saw a ridge going up. That was the shoreline of the old lake that used to be there. It wasn't a ridge. You'd go up there. Then, you were up on higher ground, and you stayed on higher ground.

TS So, how long did you stay in North Dakota then?

HF Four years, and it wasn't because we didn't have a good time. I got used to the cold. They had the quarter system, which is the only place I had the quarter system. But it was fine for engineering because we'd have our surveying in the fall and then in the spring. Everything was indoors in the winter!

TS Did they have some pretty severe winters up there?

HF Well, as I told you, one time it never got up to 0 in a solid month. I call that pretty severe.

MB Severe enough!

TS And, then, after North Dakota, where did you go?

HF Well, in the first place, it was a big thing to get a summer job because that was in the Depression. You might get a teaching job, but they still didn't pay very much. The first winter I went to--summer, I should say--I went to Ames, and I had that assistantship there. Another summer I--I think one summer I sold Real Silk hosiery, not selling very much of it. And another summer I went to Devil's Lake, and we had that--you know, FDR's not planting wheat, and the boys measured how much they didn't plant, which sounds crazy. And the third summer was actually the most interesting.

I got a job with the North Dakota Highway Department because I'm essentially a highway engineer among other things. They assigned me to the engineer in charge of a concrete bridge they were building at this town out about two hundred miles west of Fargo. My wife, for some reason--that was when she was going to have a baby--for some reason she went back to Illinois, and I never did find out. I think she just was afraid to have a baby among strangers. She went back to her sister's, which is also my brother's; and, of course, she being a physician, she's told people that we couldn't afford to have a baby that she had to go back where she could get it free. That's all hogwash because we had the hospital, we had the doctor, and we had everything there. I think frankly that she just was afraid. She was just--frankly she was just a little young for marriage, I think.

TS Yes.

HF Because the next baby we had, she just went to the hospital, came back--just routine, in fact.

TS Rolling off a log.

HF Well, anyway, I went out to this place in --I have trouble remembering names of towns and things, which doesn't matter. There's a small college there, and the college has the same name as the town. Here I went out, and I didn't know a darned thing about concrete bridges. The first thing I got there when the bridge was--when they were putting the piles in. It was on the state highway so it was a regular highway bridge, and I tried to look important the first day when the boss of the crew came to me and said, "Is that deep enough for that pile?"

HF I had not the slightest idea how far you'd drive the pile. I said, "Ah, well, I think you'd better drive it about five more times."

He said, "O.K.," and went ahead. That night I went to the--they had a field office also in the same town. I went to the field office, and I got the state's specifications. How far do you drive the pile? I found out--which I'd never known--that the engineer is supposed to have a rod, a little center rod on top of the pile. You take a shot at it with a level; and if in three strokes, I think it is, it doesn't go down more than a certain amount, that's it! It sounds complicated. It's not complicated. It's logical completely, but I had no idea. So, it's one of the things you don't learn when you're teaching.

TS Yes, practical life.

HF We stayed there all summer. I went back about four years ago. I wanted to see whether the bridge was still there! It's still there!

MB It must have been deep enough!

TS Ray, it sounds like after 1928 you put the Olympics behind you. Could you comment on the role of the Olympics in your life?

HF Well, you are completely correct about putting the Olympics behind me in '28. I said after I had failed in the tryouts, "The heck with it. This is the last race I'll ever run." Which was quite true, and in the years after the Olympics, I've been asked only to teach. Well, I was asked once to coach track, but when I found out that they weren't going to pay anything, I said, "To heck with it." I've been only asked to talk about the Olympics twice in all of that time: once at a boys' club in Chicago where I happened to know the man who ran it because he was a former classmate of mine, and the other time was at the Rotary Club luncheon in North Dakota. The only comment I got after that talk--I told a few jokes, I guess--was that one fellow came up to me and said, "This is the first time I ever got a laugh out of a college professor's stories."

So, I left that completely alone, and I had never heard of "Chariots of Fire" when it came out three years ago. My daughter called me up from Illinois and said, "Dad, do you know you're in the movies?"

I said, "To heck you say. What do you mean?"

She said, "Chariots of Fire"--it's a movie about the 1924 Olympics."

I said, "Well, that's interesting. I'd like to see it." I thought "Chariots of Fire" had to do with the South American sphinxes and things like that, and there is some sort of a movie about that that came out about the same time. But I was mixed up on the thing.

She said, "Yes, it's about Eric Liddell, and it has your name in the thing. You'd better see it."

So, I told my folks out in San Diego when I visited there that I wanted



HF to see "Chariots of Fire." It was playing in San Diego at the time. I went with my son's father-in-law. He's a long-sighted fellow, and we got just inside the picture show when he said, "Shall we sit here?" Well, my eyes were such that I heard the movie all right, but I didn't see it. The first time I didn't see it at all because I was completely away from it. I told my niece later on that I was--they had not seen "Chariots of Fire," and I wanted to see it really for the first time. I said, "The only thing is I'm going to sit in the third row!" So, we all sat down there, and whenever my name was mentioned, which is very, very seldom in the thing, the two kids cheered! And I did see "Chariots of Fire" that time. I think it is an excellent picture, and certainly one that families can enjoy. And there are two or three things that I think were overdone, but essentially it is what we did in 1924. I've seen the picture now, I believe, four times; and every time I'm glad that I've seen it.

TS How is your life changed by "Chariots of Fire"? The coming out of the movie.

HF Well, of course, the chief thing is that I have suddenly become a celebrity, and I'm called on to talk. I've talked to groups at the University of Colorado; at Colorado State University; at public libraries, I think; and at Rotary Club. And I've also been asked to officiate at senior citizens' groups. Gosh, I've had the story of my life told in newspapers and magazines. It just seems so darned foolish to me.

There's one thing from a human point of view--I got tired of going by plane to San Diego where my son lives, so I decided to take a bus one time. I came back by bus, and we got to Las Vegas where the bus broke down. So, we had to transfer buses, and all of a sudden I was reaching for my suitcase--now, at that time I was over eighty years old--and all of a sudden a strong, young hand picked up my suitcase off the rack and set it down. I looked around, and here was a very good-looking young lady. I said, "Thank you!" We got to talking; and when we got on the other bus going on, we sat together. I found out that she was a student at C.U., and she was athletically inclined. She was a member of Fellowship of Christian Athletes. She asked me whether I would talk to the Fellowship of Christian Athletes at C.U. And I said, "That's fine if I can get down there."

She said, "Oh, no, I'll come up in my car and take you down. She said, "At seven o'clock."

I said, "Seven o'clock is pretty late."

She said, "Oh, no, seven o'clock for breakfast!"

So, I went down there. She came up and got me, and I talked with a former all-American called Bobby Anderson. Bobby Anderson--that's the name, and the two of us talked to the group. We got acquainted afterwards, and he took me around to various places where I talked, for instance, at the YMCA Camp up here to a bunch of scouts, Boy Scouts.

The funny thing that happened there was that when they found out that

- HF they had me on the program, the program chairman said, "Sorry, we can't do it. Well, we'll give you three minutes." So, I got on the platform and talked five minutes. I got a pretty good applause and went back and sat down. All of a sudden you know what came skirting along there? Bibles! Because they'd given every single person there, boy there, a Bible, and every one of them passed his Bible up to get a signature. And Bobby Anderson said to me, "Let's get out of here before more Bibles come!" I must have signed thirty or forty Bibles before we finally got out of the place.
- TS Did you enjoy your trip out to the Olympics in 1984 in Los Angeles?
- HF I'm very glad I went. The only thing that troubled me is I hoped that they would have some sort of conclave for former Olympians, and apparently they didn't have any idea about former Olympians. They didn't give a darn. I saw the events, but I would so much rather have gotten together with some sort of a conclave for that.
- TS Are you the oldest living Olympic medal winner?
- HF I doubt it very much. I really don't know. I mean--well, I'll say this, have you ever heard of Elaine Rikken (Sp.?)?
- TS No.
- HF Well, she's a diver. And she was the youngest gold medal winner of all time. She competed in the '20 Olympics, so she's got me. She was sixteen at the '20 Olympics. She was about twenty at the '24 Olympics. And I have heard from a fellow who called me up from Honolulu and interviewed me. He said, "I want an interview."
- And I said, "When?"
- He said, "Right now over the telephone." And among other things he mentioned Elaine Rikken as living out there. So, I would say--well, actually, I'm older than she--
- TS You're older than she.
- HF I'm older than she is. So, she's still living, but that's it.
- TS Yes.
- HF There's one thing more about this girl that I talked to on the bus, and as I say, she was in the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. She got the idea that I was a good advisor, and she came up to the cabin several times and wrote to me. And one time she wrote that--and I guess she came up to the cabin--she had a chance to become a member of the staff of this Fellowship of Christian Athletes, which would pay her enough so that she could get her degree. She wondered whether that would be a good idea. She came up and talked to me about it. We decided that -- I think that I had influence on her--that she'd be wise to take the job and get her degree. Then <sup>h</sup>at she did, that was up to her. So, I feel that at least as far as that was concerned, I did a good job. And that's it.

- TS I think you've done a good job in a lot of different ways.
- Well, have you any other questions?
- HF Any time you fellows, either one or both, want to all up, I'll answer the questions over the telephone. I very rarely go out anywhere.
- MB I'm sure we may come up with something else; and if so, maybe we could come up with just a tape recorder and yack about it.
- HF Well, that's what I think--
- TS Yes, do it up at your place.
- HF Did you ever see the article that Andy Durrett Davis (Sp.?) actually Andrea Davis wrote for Modern Maturity about me?
- TS Yes, it was a very nice article.
- HF She did the same thing you did. I didn't realize it when she interviewed me. She came up alone one time and interviewed me at the cabin. She called up and made the appointment. When we got through, she had the tape recorder there, and I guess I asked something about it. She said, "Yes," she did it from that. Then, she called up later, and she brought her whole family up, which is three kids and husband and herself. She asked the finishing questions that she hadn't thought of before or something like that. They lived in Thornton, and her husband got a job near L.A. They went up there in February of this year, and I got a letter-- a nice letter from Andy, saying that if I came to the Olympics would I come and stay with their family all the time I was there. It was so much nicer than going to a hotel. That's exactly what I did. I found out afterwards that their thirteen year old girl had suggested that she give up her bedroom. The poor thirteen year old slept on the davenport in the living-room while I slept in her bed, but we had a very good time all the time.
- TS That's good.
- Did you have a chance to meet any athletes when you were out there in California?
- HF No.
- TS O.K.
- HF I was trying to think if there was any time I met one or two. Well, I met one or two at the Olympic headquarters, but I don't even remember who they were. So, aside from that, no.
- TS You did have special things happen to you while you were out there, didn't you, as far as that Robert Schuler (Sp.?) Crystal Cathedral thing?
- HF Oh, yes. Boy, that was a break for me! I went to the--what's his name?

- HF      Ron took me to the Crystal Cathedral Sunday night, and I talked to the-- actually the assistant pastor interviewed me on the stage. When I got home, here was a check for two hundred dollars, which wasn't bad at all. The biggest I've ever gotten for talking like that!
- TS      Have you seen the show on television or heard anything about when it was going to be on?
- HF      No, I don't know. And, then, ABC interviewed me; but that was, heck, that was only three minutes long. It was just outside of the stadium at night, which was fine because it showed the Olympic torch and everything, but those were the only two times that anything like that has happened.
- TS      It's still pretty interesting though, I imagine.
- HF      Oh, you get a thrill out of those things. I think that anybody who goes to the Olympic stadium just gets a thrill looking at the thing.
- TS      Yes.
- HF      It's really something.
- TS      Well, anything else?
- MB      I think that will probably do it for now.

Transcribing, editing, and final transcript: Lorraine Roberts  
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